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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 002844

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV MD RS

SUBJECT: NESTERUSHKIN CONFIRMS IMMINENT 2 PLUS 1 TALKS ON TRANSNISTRIA

Classified By: PolCouns Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Russian Special Negotiator for the Transnistria Conflict Valeriy Nesterushkin confirmed that Moldovan President Voronin and Transnistrian leader Smirnov would meet the week of September 22 in 2 plus 1 talks, with Russia mediating, though a specific time and date had not yet been agreed. Nesterushkin described the 5 plus 2 format as "senseless," arguing the leaders should negotiate directly, without need for observers. Negotiations would involve elements from previous proposals, such as the Kozak or Moldovan package. He projected a possible five to six-year presence of peacekeepers and the closing of the munitions base within six months. End Summary.

Time and format

¶2. (C) Russian Special Negotiator for the Transnistria conflict Valeriy Nesterushkin on September 22 confirmed that Moldovan President Voronin and Transnistrian leader Smirnov would meet the week of September 22, as reported by daily newspaper Kommersant. Nesterushkin expressed frustration with the inability of the leaders to actually agree on a time and venue for this week's talks. Nesterushkin said the parties hoped to finalize an agreement by December. He explained the deadline as driven by desire to avoid delays that could allow the settlement to unravel.

¶3. (C) Nesterushkin criticized the 5 plus 2 format as "useless" in the current context, as it was unimaginable how the two leaders should sit and discuss issues while five observers looked on. Nesterushkin said the format had been useful to bring parties to the negotiating table, and could provide other assistance, if the conflict parties so wished. He did not discount the possibility that the 5 plus 2 could witness the signing of a final agreement, and acknowledged Voronin's insistence that any decision be agreeable to the 5 plus 2 members.

No pre-agreed points

¶4. (C) Nesterushkin was cautious about confirming that certain aspects of a deal had already been pre-agreed, such as Transnistria's willingness to forego talk of independence. On the possibility of Moldova's agreement to guarantee neutrality, Nesterushkin expressed doubts about Voronin's sincerity, and envisioned a clause in the final agreement allowing Transnistria to veto or opt out of any decision affecting Moldova's neutrality. On Transnistrian calls for independence, Nesterushkin confirmed that the GOR had "brought Transnistria down to earth" by urging Smirnov to decide whether he "wanted an agreement, or for the conflict to go on," as "not all political solutions were possible."

Russian peacekeepers stay

¶5. (C) Nesterushkin expected the parties would draw elements from existing settlement plans, including the Kozak plan and the Moldova package, but insisted that a system of "checks and balances," as provided by the Kozak plan, was necessary. When pressed on the Russian peacekeepers, he said they would continue to guarantee peace between the sides, and the overall number of peacekeepers would remain at current levels--335 Russian, 453 Moldovan, 490 Transnistrian and 10 Ukrainian peacekeepers. Rather than remaining for the 20 years envisioned in the Kozak plan, he projected their mission to last five to six years. Similarly, Nesterushkin sounded conciliatory about the presence of the Russian munitions at Colbasna, saying "everything can be resolved" and that the munitions could be withdrawn within five to six months, if a resolution to the conflict was found.

Comment

¶6. (C) The difficulty in setting the meeting may reflect that the Russian push for a 2 plus 1 format is more difficult than Nesterushkin was willing to concede. Russia would like to present a breakthrough on Transnistria as a counterpoint to its use of military force in Georgia.

BEYRLE